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NSC BRIEFING

6 May 1954

INDOCHINA MILITARY SITUATION

I. Third phase Viet Minh assaults on Dien Bien Phu began night 1 - 2 May.

- A. Enemy threw 10 to 12 battalions against French positions in center and southern strongpoint, ^(MAIN COMPLEX THE SNAKE EATER)
- B. Human waves overwhelmed six positions in bitter hand-to-hand fighting.
- C. Altogether, Viet Minh overran Eliane Haut 3, Eliane Bas 1 and 2, Huguette 4 and 5, and Isabelle 5.
- D. Vigorous French counterattacks ^{LED VIGOROUSLY}, however, succeeded ^{in recouping half the losses}. At end of 2 May, French had retaken Eliane ^{BAS} 2, Huguette 4, Isabelle 5.
- E. Isabelle 5, however, totally destroyed; French

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- F. Lull in enemy activity followed, but army attaché reports assaults flared again on night 3 - 4 May.
- 1. Enemy in four-battalion strength retook Huguette 4.

II. Intensity of fight illustrated by casualties.

- A. French put their losses at up to two battalions.
- B. French estimate half of attacking enemy force ^{BEGINNIE} were casualties.

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III. Viet Minh apparently still determined to reduce garrison at any cost.

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A. [redacted] enemy still moving replacements toward Dien Bien Phu -- as many as 16,000 raw recruits. Many, however, will not arrive for several weeks.

B. Enemy supply position ^{PROBABLY} believed adequate, although

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IV. French, on other hand, have touch-and-go supply situation, understrength units.

A. Weather and constantly dwindling drop area makes resupply unpredictable. On 2 May, French dropped 130 tons; 40 percent fell outside positions.

B. Although book value of French garrison is 11 battalions, each is down from normal 800 strength to between 200 and 300.

C. French now reinforcing with a French paratroop battalion; 109 dropped on main positions night of 2 - 3 May, another 128 the following night.

D. Garrison reported exhausted, however.

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B. Dismal prospect is this: after Dien Bien Phu, enemy can in several weeks reinforce delta area heavily if it chooses; French, unless enemy relaxes pressure in other areas, will find delta reinforcement more difficult. In meantime, enemy strengthens hold on delta populace, expands bases there. Gets ready for big push in fall, perhaps even sooner.

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VII. In other Indochina areas, situation has changed little in past week.

- A. In central Laos, Viet Minh units are avoiding major engagements with strong French forces.
- B. In southern Laos and northern Cambodia, four Viet Minh battalions are collecting food and organizing bases in preparation for possible further advance southward.
- C. Assistant army attaché Saigon, after trip to Cambodia last week, considered five Cambodian battalions in invasion area adequate to meet threat and the army under competent control of Defense minister.

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1. However, he criticized completely defensive mentality and poor tactical judgment of Cambodian officers. In field, they call for more barbed wire, more machine pistols; one company of 120 men at Kratie has entire strength in crowded rectangle 125 by 75 yards.

Note: French garrison ordered
to surrender on 7 May.

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